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UNCLAS AMMAN 010012

SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: TRUCKERS' DISRUPTION HAVING MINIMAL IMPACT ON
TRANSPORT OF AQABA PORT GOODS

REF: AMMAN 9945

SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIED.

11. (SBU) Jordanian officials say the Aqaba port is running smoothly, despite a 18-day-old truckers' work disruption capturing local newspaper headlines. According to Aqaba Special Economic Zone Authority Commissioner of Revenue and Customs Shadi Majali, about 1,000 to 1,500 truckers are targeting only the Aqaba Container Terminal, now under management of private A.P. Moller Terminals. Jordan has a mixed trucking fleet of over 12,000 vehicles, including some companies with 100-300 vehicles and numerous independent drivers. Most trucks in the fleet can and do haul containers; regulations controlling container trucks are not enforced. The truckers' attempt to stop container trucks on the main Desert Highway have been thwarted by a special government order: containers continue to be loaded on trucks given special dispensation to travel the Dead Sea highway. By all appearances, just about all containers are making it out of Aqaba Port. Majali said that over the last five work days, the container port has successfully uploaded each day 450, 419, 545, 414, 354, and 361 container trucks, working back from Saturday through Tuesday, respectively. He said the average was only slightly below that before the truckers' disruption.

12. (SBU) Other parts of the port -- loading trucks with commodities, cement, livestock or oil -- are "going along fine," said Majali. "Anything not with the container port has nothing to do with it," he emphasized, and all such trucks were getting through. Traders were not complaining, he added. Majali said he believed some quarters were "blowing the whole thing out of proportion." He said he believed that the truckers' action was "breaking up." According to a QIZ owner who joined a group meeting with Prime Minister Faisal Fayez December 18, the PM appeared to favor their arguments not to compromise on the exemption of QIZ deliveries from the truck queue system, whereby any trucker of any quality is assigned a load when the queue ticket comes up. (COMMENT: This does not mean the truckers' demand for a modified queue system might not be met, only that the QIZs are not likely to be a part of any final arrangement. The queue system is scheduled to be replaced with an open-market system in September, 2005. END COMMENT.)
HALE